

Shattered Glass

By: pyrofreeze

In a twist of fate, Naruto takes the hit Sasuke was supposed to bear, and Haku and Sasuke find themselves racing against the clock to save Naruto before its too late... AU

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Hesitation

Shattered Glass

Summary: A moment's hesitation makes all the difference, and in just a split-second, our world could be shattered. In a twist of fate, Naruto takes the hit Sasuke was supposed to bear, and Haku and Sasuke find themselves racing against the clock to save Naruto before its too late... AU

Disclaimer: Some lines in this chapter are taken directly from the manga, while others are more or less paraphrased, so... any lines/plot that you recognize obviously belong to Kishimoto Masashi.

Chapter 1: Hesitation

Naruto was one of a kind; if there were anything in the world that was completely certain, it was that one little fact. Sasuke was certain that no other ninja in the world would have made an entrance like *Naruto* made an entrance, especially when one knew they were dealing with very, very dangerous opponents; no other ninja was nearly as loud, stupid, ostentatious, and utterly as unpredictable as Naruto... Or at least Sasuke *hoped* that that was the case; after all, *one* Naruto in the world was more than enough. But despite his rather... *flamboyant*, and rather idiotic choice of entrances into battle, Sasuke was grateful to have Naruto there; even though he would never admit it *out loud*, the idiot *did* get lucky every so often, and came up with clever plans... and no one could ever *possibly* say he wasn't dedicated and determined. With Naruto aiding Sakura, Sasuke felt he could fight Haku at ease without having to worry about the bridge builder. Sakura, while book smart, didn't have the hardened heart and instincts of a ninja, so he hadn't exactly felt *completely* comfortable leaving her in charge of protecting Tazuna, even *with* Kakashi nearby, but Naruto... he felt he could trust Tazuna with Naruto. With that thought, Sasuke turned to face his opponent

once more, who's reflection stood stagnant and staring back at him from the cage of mirrors around him. Knowing Tazuna would be safe took a bit of weight off his shoulders, and now at long last, he'd be able to focus solely on fighting now that he knew that their "mission objective" was safe...

"Hey! I'm here Sasuke!"

Sasuke turned around with a start at the sound of a familiar voice, and mentally took back every compliment he had given to Naruto moments before.

"What are you *doing* here idiot?!" He demanded harshly, not quite believing he had actually used the words "*clever*" and "*Naruto*" in the same sentence only moments before.

"I'm here to save you of course!" Naruto responded joyfully, giving Sasuke an arrogant smile.

Sasuke wanted to bang his head against the wall. "*Of all the stupid things in the world!*" he wanted to scream, but pride prevented him from getting flustered.

Sasuke glared at Naruto. "You Moron... you should've attacked the mirrors from the *outside* instead of sneaking in here to "save me"! We could have had the *advantage*, and attacked him from *both sides*!"

Naruto blinked, and then-upon realizing his fault-laughed sheepishly. "Err... Oops?"

The Uchiha nearly growled, and had a strong desire to bang *Naruto's* head against a wall. "Whatever Moron; but now that you're here, we might as well make the best of it..." The two shared a look and nodded at each other before springing into action.

"If possible, I don't want to have to kill you." The statement was stated so honest, and yet in such a blasé manner that it took a few moments for it to register to Sasuke.

"What?" Naruto asked dumbly, pausing for a moment, and dropping his guard like for an instant, leaving a perfect opening... and opening the enemy did not take at the moment.

"I do not want to have to kill you." The boy shinobi told them again, his mask hiding his face that might have revealed the emotions he was feeling, "And nor do I want you to have to kill me." Naruto just continued to stare, as if confused. "But if you will fight me here, and raise a blade against me, I will become a shinobi, a ninja. And with your power, and with mine, we will do battle here on this bridge... we will battle for our dreams here."

"Our dreams?" Naruto asked, an odd sort of look in his eyes that made Sasuke sigh; Naruto didn't have the heart of a ninja yet truly, but at least he was better than Sakura, and understood what needed to be done, and *did* it.

"I will fight for my dreams, as you will fight for yours." Haku told them simply, "Please; don't hate me. It is my dream to protect, and serve that person that is precious to me, and for that dream, I will kill if I must."

"A... precious person?" Naruto echoed quietly, looking away. Sasuke wondered if Naruto was going to go overly sentimental on him, but quickly shooed away this worry; even *if* Haku's words had struck a chord in Naruto, Naruto wouldn't let it effect the fight... and moments later, this sentiment was echoed on Naruto's face as the boy gave Sasuke a confident grin as if to say "*We're not going to lose to this guy; we're going to win no matter what.*"

Sasuke knew that Kakashi thought they couldn't do this; there were so many reasons *why* they *shouldn't* be able to after all. They were young, inexperienced, and had never killed, and truly, even Sasuke told himself that *he* had the strength to take a life, he wouldn't know

for sure until that time came. He didn't know if he had that strength, and he didn't know if Naruto had that strength... but they were about to find out.

The sound of shattering glass filled the air again and again, followed by the 'whoosh' of flying needles and the thick 'plop' of blood wetly hitting the ground.

"We can't go on like this." Sasuke thought, even though his body was already preparing itself for another go, and even while his hands were poised, and ready to do the hand signs for his fire jutsu. He knew they *couldn't* continue the battle the way it was going, but they *had* to; they had to keep fighting, and they had to find a way around Haku's bloodline jutsu. And Sasuke was sure they were getting close to find the hole in Haku's defenses; he could feel it, and he was getting close to being able to follow Haku's movement...

"Again." Sasuke whispered, and with a nod, and a hand sigh, Naruto created his shadow clones, and attacked the mirrors once more. On cue, Haku fled the mirrors at top speed, and Sasuke, with his sharingan eyes trained on Haku, released his jutsu and sent red flames spiraling towards the boy.

"I didn't get a direct hit!" Sasuke's mind hissed, *"But it was closer this time... We're almost there!"* again, Sasuke let out a growl of pain as Haku once again bombarded them with needles, bringing both boys to their knees.

"Again?" Naruto asked without hesitation, though his voice gave away his true fatigue. Sasuke turned to look at his teammate; if there was anything admirable about Naruto, it was the boy's will power and determination.

"Again." Sasuke agreed, readying himself to attack once more while Naruto attacked the mirrors with his clones again. But for some reason, the newest barrage of needles was harsher than before, and it was enough to bring Naruto to his knees again.

"*Moron.*" Sasuke chided his teammate mentally; "*Get up stupid so we can attack again!*"

Just then, there was a *whoosh* of air; Haku was attacking again! Sasuke readied himself for defense, but then he saw it: Haku wasn't aiming for *him* ! He was aiming for *Naruto* . Sasuke's blood ran cold, and his entire body seemed to stop for a complete second, and for a single moment, his brain froze. There weren't many options for protecting Naruto; in fact, there were only two choices really: take the hit for Naruto, or let Naruto take the hit himself. Those needles that Haku was about to throw weren't aimed to weaken, or hurt; they were meant to kill, and they *would* kill Naruto... but if he stepped in front of Naruto, and took the needles for him, it would be *him* who would be the dead one...

... He didn't want Naruto to die, but was he ready to give his life for another? For *Naruto* ? Sasuke hesitated for only a moment before irrationally running for Naruto in hopes that his body would make a choice for him when he got there, but that moment of hesitation had made all the difference; it was too late. The needles had already hit their mark.

Naruto only flinched slightly as the needles hit him, but for some reason, the very sight was more horrifying then watching a man being tortured to death to Sasuke. Shakily, Sasuke pressed his fingers to Naruto's neck to check for a pulse... but there was nothing. No beat, no sound, no heart; dead. Sasuke felt his whole body begin to shake; Naruto? *Dead* ?! No, it couldn't be... !

"... Why didn't you jump in front of him?" asked a shaky voice, "The only reason I went for him, was to lure *you* to take the hit."

Sasuke turned, and was surprised to find that the source of the voice was his opponent wearing the mask of the hunter nin... only, the boy no longer was wearing the mask, and had instead taken off the mask to reveal a kind, almost *feminine* face.

"W-what?" Sasuke asked, "Hey, you're that person from the forest!"

"He's a very noble person." Haku commented, leaning down to look at Naruto and ignoring Sasuke's comment, "And he has a very kind heart. I didn't want to kill him, I truly didn't... and if I could bring him back, I would; there aren't many ninja like him in the world. He's truly one of a kind."

"Yeah." Sasuke agreed shakily, looking down on Naruto, and not believing that Naruto could *possibly* be *dead*... And of course, Naruto, being Konoha's #1 unpredictable ninja, Naruto didn't disappoint.

"... What the...?!"

Naruto's eyes suddenly flew open, and around his entire body, chakra began swirling in masses so large that they could be seen with the naked eye. Somewhere else on the bridge, Kakashi's eyes went wide. "That chakra... !"

But of course, Kakashi wasn't the only one to notice the sheer amount of chakra; in fact, some miles away, someone else felt the presence of a familiar, demon chakra, but for the moment, Sasuke didn't know about any of that, and it was therefore no concern to him. At the moment, his priority was dealing with a Naruto was acting very much out of character to him...

... And to think so much could all be a result of just one moment of hesitation...

-pyrofreeze

Common Ground

A/N: I don't think I've ever updated anything this quickly before... but I was just so delighted at the number of people who have alerts for this story that I ended up writing this chapter during times when I really should have been doing other things... (i.e. homework and studying) So consider this quick update my little valentine's gift to everyone ;)

Chapter 2:Common Ground

Sasuke prided himself on being able to keep his cool in most situations. Truly, Sasuke had only lost his nerve once before when Itachi had murdered their entire clan, but that was understandable; he felt that as a little kid, it had been within his right to get... a *little* upset at least upon discovering that within a matter of hours your entire family was gone...

... but with that in mind, perhaps a "little upset" was a *bit* of an understatement when it came to describing how he had felt that day; "upset" didn't even *begin* to cover his feelings... but at the moment, that horrible day was the least of his worries; currently, he was a bit preoccupied with an almost primal-acting Naruto, who was eyeing him as if he were a very nice, large bowl of ramen. Sasuke prided himself on being able to keep his cool in most situations; the key word here being "*most*". And considering that Naruto had started acting like some sort of beast, and as if he only saw Sasuke as a potential pretty, and not as his teammate, Sasuke was *pretty* sure this particular event just might qualify as an acceptable time to be slightly unhinged.

Naruto was, in short, the most vibrant, energetic, and by far the most idiotic person Sasuke had ever met, but this Naruto... *this* Naruto that was before him wasn't Naruto at all; not even a shadow of Naruto's sunny smile remained on that face. All that was left was an

eerie primal rage. Just taking one look at that supposed "Naruto" that was before him made him immediately separate this *person* before him, and Naruto in his mind; the person before him wasn't Naruto, and no one could convince him otherwise. After all, *Naruto* wasn't a particularly speedy person, or rather, he was just as fast as any other ninja, and *this* Naruto before him was running at him at an inhuman speed; Sasuke hardly had time to register that Naruto was charging at him before the boy was just inches from him. If Haku hadn't pushed Sasuke out of the way at that moment, Naruto would have taken him down in a probably very violent, primitive manor that would have been very un-Naruto like.

"What is that?" Haku asked, "What is that chakra?" Sasuke didn't answer but it seemed Haku hadn't been waiting for one, so he continued, "It seems we've caused Naruto's body to use some sort of..."last resort". Apparently, it seems that my 'mortal blow' has awoken some savage power within him that's meant to protect him if his life is on the line. I've only ever seen anything close to this chakra once before, but..." Haku shook his head, "In any case, we must subdue him if possible; he seems ready to attack, if not kill anyone within his sights."

Sasuke eyed Haku distrustfully; obviously, he didn't have any faith in Haku, considering that the boy was his opponent, and his enemy. Naruto was *his* teammate, and this "Haku" guy was a complete stranger.

"Look, I know you don't trust me, and truly, you don't have reason to," Haku began, eyeing Naruto to make sure he wasn't about to attack, "But for the moment, we have to work together if you want to save your friend."

"He's not my friend." Sasuke told him on reflex, but truly... Sasuke wasn't quite sure if that was entirely true. In any case, Haku ignored the comment, and simply looked at him as if to say 'Well?' Finally, Sasuke nodded mutely; he didn't *want* to work with Haku, but for the moment, they somehow were on common ground, and they had a mutual goal and interest: Naruto.

"Now don't panic; *relax*, and for just this single moment, *trust me* ." Haku whispered suddenly, grabbing onto Sasuke from behind, causing the Uchiha to tense on reflex.

"Wha-?" Sasuke started, but before he could even ask Haku what he had meant, the boy had already sprung into action, dodging a lunging Naruto to hurl them both into one of the mirrors.

Sasuke closed his eyes and braced himself for impact, and for the crunch of glass against flesh... but it never came; instead he felt a sort of odd clam overcome him. Hesitantly, he opened his eyes, and found himself suspended in a world of icy blue. It was cold, but not so cold that he shivered, and while the great blue around him was reminiscent of water to a degree, he didn't feel wet, and he didn't feel as though he were swimming...

"You are now connected to my jutsu." Haku's voice said from behind him, reminding Sasuke of his presence, "Whatever fail safe we've awakened in Naruto is dangerous, and I believe this advantage of speed may be our only hope to subdue him." Haku walked forward out from behind Sasuke to stand besides him. "Now, a quick lesson on how this jutsu works... I suppose we'll see exactly how sharp the Uchiha are, eh?" Haku smirked, "Listen carefully because I'm only going to give you the instructions once:" Haku went to the mirror's opening, which appeared to Sasuke as a slow-moving movie of the outside world framed by an expanse of blue. But also as Sasuke looked out through the mirror's entrance, he didn't just see the world thorough one perspective, but he felt as though he were looking through *all* of Haku's mirrors at the same time, and he could see the battlefield from each and every possible vantage point... Sasuke imagined that this ability to see the battlefield from all points was very handy in battle.

"All you need to do is to step out of the mirror and into the world." Haku explained "But from there, it gets a bit tricky." Haku looked back at him and regarded him seriously, "As soon as you vacate a mirror, you cannot go back; once you're out, you must get into another mirror fairly quickly, or risk being disconnected from the

jutsu, or in my case, canceling out the jutsu completely. Once you've left your mirror, you will become aware of various pathways connecting the mirrors to one another; you must choose a path, and follow it with haste, and you must follow it to the end. Do *not* get off a path once you're on it..." Haku paused briefly in his explanation as a wave of Naruto's chakra hit them, indicating a spike in his power. "Remember to keep to the paths, and at the same time be aware of Naruto's position, and plan counterattack measures against him; good luck." Haku told him honestly before slipping on his hunter-nin mask, and stepping out from the mirror, and vanishing onto the battlefield. After apprehensively pausing for only a few moments, Sasuke himself went to the mirror's exit, and took a deep breath before leaving the mirror himself.

Sasuke immediately was filled with the sensation of flying; the air around him "whoosh"-ed pleasantly, and he felt so very deeply *connected* to something... it was like his heart was a part of the network of mirrors, and as if they were not merely *mirrors* but *appendages* almost, or continuations of himself. Also, Sasuke could feel Haku's presence thorough the mirrors as well, but he could only feel that the other ninja was *there*, and nothing more, and somehow, he wasn't surprised; after all, it was Haku's jutsu, and in a way, the mirrors-despite how he felt-were not a part of him so much as he was a part of *them*, because Haku had pulled *him* into the network. But nonetheless, he was somehow a part of the network, and somewhere instead of him, he knew exactly where to go to get to where he was going, and where the pathways between the mirrors were, and how to follow them; in fact, his body seemed to flow down the right course automatically. Because of this handy "auto-pilot" feeling that guided him to where he needed to go, he was able to concentrate on Naruto.

Sasuke was taken aback at first at the sight of his teammate: wild red eyes, sharp pointed claws, fang-like teeth, and swirling masses of orange chakra... Naruto truly looked like a monster.

The world around him felt slow, but he himself felt he was moving normally; however, Naruto wasn't moving that slowly however, meaning that truly, the boy was moving very, very fast. Sasuke furiously tried to think up a course of action, but it was then that Naruto's red eyes spotted him, causing his heart to freeze; *this was Naruto* ? It couldn't be... but it was.

"Naruto, snap out of it moron!" Sasuke urged harshly with a growl, "This isn't like you!"

Naruto only lashed out at him-coming dangerously close-in response. Aiming to disable, and not kill, Sasuke took a kunai from his pouch, and threw the weapon at his teammate...

... Only to have said teammate dodge it. Cursing, Sasuke simply concentrated on getting into the next mirror, and threw himself through the icy surface.

"Not bad." Haku commented with an amused smile, "For a beginner anyway; truly, we need a plan of action however."

"Agreed." Sasuke replied reluctantly, "He's fast, *and* he's strong... I don't know how we can knock sense into him *without* hurting him in the process."

"Then you need to understand he may *need* to be hurt in the process of saving him." Haku told him seriously.

Sasuke glared, "Moments ago you said that you *liked* Naruto and thought he was a good person and *now* you want to hurt him?" Sasuke growled, "If so, we're not both working for the same goal anymore..."

"I think you misunderstand." Haku drawled, eyeing Sasuke, "You truly are inexperienced, aren't you, despite what you want people to think; you don't understand the meaning of pain."

Sasuke couldn't hold himself back: he lunged at Haku, catching the other nin off guard, and tackling him to the floor. "Don't ever make the mistake to say that I don't know the meaning of pain." He hissed, not bother to conceal his fury, "If anyone in the world understands pain, its *me* ."

"Ah yes; your clan... I had heard you were the last Uchiha, and how the rest were murdered, so perhaps... you might *know* pain, but you do not *understand* it, nor do you know its *purpose*, and why it's a necessary part of life; for us to live, we must sometime feel pain, for pain is just as necessary as joy or happiness is to a person. Pain teaches us what things we shouldn't do, and it shows us what is a mistake to do or have done, and most of all, pain is one of the most efficient ways of proving a point, and in this case, shaking Naruto out of this madness he's trapped in."

"But-"

"No *but*s ." Haku told him firmly, "you must accept that pain is a necessary part of life; you want your friend to regain control of himself, right?"

"He's my rival, not my friend."

"Whatever you may call it, the bond is still the same." Haku replied, "friend, rival, brother, enemy... it does not matter what name you label your connection with; in the end, the bond is what it is." Haku pushed Sasuke off himself suddenly, "And to protect that bond, you must understand that it is your duty as his "rival" to knock sense into him, even if it means using force." Haku went to the entrance of the mirror, "I'm going to aim my sebon needles at points meant to disable, and hopefully, we'll be able to either hinder, or even disable his ability to move freely completely. I don't care if you don't agree with my way of doing things, but I will follow through with what I believe is right, despite what you may think is the right choice of action. You may follow my plans, or you may work against me, and go through with your own plans; ultimately, what you do is your choice, but truly, if we don't work together, then our work will only be

counterproductive." And with that, Haku disappeared through the glass. Sauske merely cursed under his breath.

If they wanted to save Naruto, Sauske knew that they both would have to stand on common ground, if even just for a short while, and while didn't *want* to, the only way to do that was to follow through with Haku's plan. Working on their own, Haku and Sasuke wouldn't be able to bring down the beast-like Naruto, but working together, they just might have a chance at bringing back the old Naruto...

... All that Sasuke wanted now was to know *what in the world* was going on, and *what* sort of thing had taken control of Naruto's consciousness; but the answers could come later. That moment wasn't a time for chit-chat; it was a time for action.

A/N: Reviews are always loved and appreciated. ;)

-pyrofreeze

Strength in Numbers

Chapter 3: Strength in Numbers

As a ninja, you always have to be prepared for anything and everything; Sasuke knows this, but still, though he has tried to always be ready to fight, no matter the situation, he isn't quite sure he's prepared to fight Naruto like this. He had fought Naruto in the past, but never like *this* ; those fights before had been training, and sparring... *this* was the real deal. The way Naruto moves now, the way he attacks... it all screamed "kill" to Sasuke, while he was used to having Naruto attack him in an almost *playful* manner. Before, it had been about competition, about becoming stronger by fighting together, but *this* method of fighting was one meant to cause pain, and to kill.

"If this is too much for you, say so now." Haku told him before he readied himself for another attempt at attacking Naruto, "If you can't fight him, don't get in my way, and just sit this out."

Sasuke barred his teeth and hissed that he was "fine." He could do this; he *had* too.

"Suit yourself." Haku said with a shrug, "Get ready to move." And with that, he leapt from mirror followed closely by Sasuke. Haku sent a spray of needles towards the raging Naruto while Sasuke rained a spray of fire down in hopes of weakening, or otherwise distracting Naruto from dodging the needles, but to no avail.

Haku landed in a new mirror and huffed, "This isn't working; he's too fast."

"Well then, what do you suggest we do since you're the "man with the plan" and all." Sasuke asked sarcastically, causing Haku to give

him a dirty look... or rather, he *assumed* he gave him a dirty look, but he couldn't tell because of the mask.

"In situations of high risk, or in situations with high demands, there are two things needed to overcome the situation... the first being great power; but if this is not enough, you must have something else." Haku turned to Sasuke, "If power is not enough, you need manpower to overwhelm your opponent."

Hatake Kakashi was not about to let Momochi Zabuza get the better of him; no, of all the battles he had ever fought, *this* one was one of the most important of all. He was fighting for the lives of his students; students, who had never killed, and never been in a true combat situation, and needed protecting. He didn't doubt their skills as ninja... he just wasn't sure his student's skills were ready to be put to the test in such a way.

Kakashi cast an anxious glance over at the prison of mirrors that encaged Sasuke and Naruto. There was nothing he could do for them at the moment; he would have to trust that they wouldn't get themselves killed. At the moments, all he could do was protect Sakura and the bridge builder from harm; all he could do was focus all of his attention on what he *could* do... and that was defeating the Demon of the mist that stood before him.

"What, worried about your precious little students?" Zabuza mocked, seeing Kakashi eye Haku's prison of mirrors, "You have reason to be; but I want a challenge Kakashi, and killing you won't be as fun if you allow your mind to be clouded by distractions."

It was then that it hit them: the wave of fierce, demonic chakra, that sent shivers down Kakashi's spine, and sent his mind reeling with bitter nostalgia. He hadn't felt such a rush of chakra such as *this* for a long time; in fact, the last time he had felt such a chakra was when the Kyuubi-Kakashi froze.

Naruto!

Kakashi's eyes immediately flew to the mirrors once more. If that chakra was *truly* the Kyuubi's, then they were all in a monumental amount danger. If the demon fox within Naruto had taken over, then it had to be stopped, and *he* would have to be the one do stop it, but... how to get away from Zabuza...?

Luckily in the end, the problem solved itself.

"Haku." Zabuza sneered, seeing his accomplice appear by his side, "I see you've already finished those two poor excuse for ninja..." he then eyed Haku suspiciously, as if judging him, before finally adding a tense, "Right?"

"Ah... Not exactly Zabuza-san..." Haku told him calmly, before turning to look at Kakashi. "I'm sorry Zabuza-san, but now isn't the time to fight them; right now, there are bigger problems to be dealt with... and if we want to make it through this easily, we need their help; *all* of their help, meaning that your battle with Kakashi will have to wait for the time being."

"What are you talking about kid?" Zabuza questioned, eyeing both Haku and Kakashi suspiciously, "Whatever you're talking about isn't part of the plan..."

"For the time being, the plan is irrelevant." Haku replied mysteriously, "Now, Kakashi-san, I will be requiring your help..."

"What the hell is going on?" Zabuza hissed the moment Haku transported the Jounin and the S-ranked missing nin into his prison of mirrors, "You'd better have a good explanation for this Haku..."

"I am truly sorry Zabuza-san." Haku replied, bowing slightly, "But we must stop Naruto; we can worry about finishing our individual fights afterwards if you wish, but for the time being... this is more important then our original mission."

Just then, Kakashi and Zabuza were surprised when a rather feral-looking Naruto leapt at them like a savage beast on the hunt, but Haku, having anticipated it, pulled the two older ninjas into one of his mirrors just in time.

"Naruto!" Kakashi exclaimed, his eyes widening for a moment in surprise, "What's happened to him?"

"He's been overcome by some dark and instinctual power..." Sasuke replied, from behind them, startling the older two ninjas, "I don't know what it is, but I *do* know he needs to be stopped... that chakra is something dangerous, and if left on its own for too long..." Sasuke's sentence trailed off, indicating an underlying, unsaid thought that each of the ninjas had running through his head at the moment.

Of the four standing in the mirror, the one whose thoughts on the subject that were most unknown were Zabuza's; the demon of the mist stood, staring out of the mirror at the circling orange-clad boy who seemed to be watching all the mirrors anxiously, as if he were ready to attack at any moment, but was waiting for the opportune moment. His face was expressionless for a time, before his eyes furrowed slightly, and his face adopted a thoughtful look.

"That chakra..." he whispered suddenly, in a voice that was uncharacteristically quiet for him, "I've... felt something like this before..."

"Indeed... I had been wondering if you would feel it too..." Haku murmured, "The similarity between *this* chakra here, and of *that* time..."

"Indeed... I see what you meant now; about how this was more important than our original mission..." Zabuza muttered, lifting his sword, "Alright then; I'll agree to this Haku, and to that whim of yours to keep the boy alive; that is what you want, isn't it? After all, you would have used more powerful jutsus that would have left behind more signs of a struggle on the battlefield... the fact that the battlefield is hardly damaged is sign that you haven't been trying to

use killing moves." Zabuza smirked, "Very well; I'll allow you to fulfill this impulse of yours this time... hey, Kakashi." Zabuza turned towards the Jounin and nodded, "It look like our fight will have to be postponed; for the time being, we're going to have to work together to save that *precious* student of yours."

Kakashi simply nodded in response; for the time being, they'd have to be allies in order to achieve their own respective goals.

"So, Kakashi, I have a feeling you have an idea about what this is, right?" Zabuza shrugged, "but you're not willing to share, are you?"

"What this is isn't of importance." Kakashi ground out, "What *is* important is stopping Naruto safely. And I'm assuming you procured my and Zabuza's help because you and Sasuke were incapable of subduing Naruto on your own, am I right?"

Haku nodded. "With our combined numbers and strength, we shouldn't have a problem now, subduing Naruto." Haku replied simply, going to the opening of the mirror, "So, Zabuza-san, Kakashi-san... would you mind disconnecting from the mirrors and attacking Naruto from the ground? That way, when he's distracted I can disable him with my needles with help from Sasuke-san."

"Very well." Zabuza replied stepping out of the mirror and dropping to the ground at once, "Coming Kakashi?" Kakashi followed the Demon of the Mist silently, and almost at once, Naruto sprang into action.

Kakashi was taken by surprise at first at the animalistic way in which Naruto attacked, but he soon got over it after remembering that it was the *Kyuubi's* power he was dealing with after all. But even though his mind knew that in all technicality, it was the demon he was fighting, his heart could only see Naruto... and even though he'd never admit it, he had grown fond of the members of Team Seven in even the short amount of time they'd been together. He took out a kunai, and took up a fighting stance; He *had* to do this, for Naruto's sake... Otherwise, the demon might take over Naruto's conscience,

and then it would be too late to save Konoha's number one unpredictable ninja.

Claws and blades clashed as Naruto's demonic nails collided with Kakashi's kunai. Wasting no time, Kakashi leapt away and formed several hand seals, creating two clones; he couldn't really use any really effective attack jutsus against Naruto after all, or he'd risk killing his student. The clones, and the original surrounded Naruto on all sides, causing the boy to snarl savagely, as his eyes darted from one Kakashi double to the next as if trying to evaluate which copy was real. Zabuza didn't waste any time taking advantage of Naruto's moment of hesitation and confusion. He sprang at once, taking his sword, and using the flat of his blade to knock the air out of his opponent, stunning Naruto for a moment, leaving an opportunity for Haku to strike.

Kakashi allowed himself a small smile; it was working! In their numbers, they were able to overwhelm the slightly savage Naruto. The end of the fight was drawing near; in just moments, victory would be theirs! Haku flew from his mirror across the field at top speed, his needles poised and ready to aim to disable Naruto, and possibly to knock him out. Just a few more moments, and then... !

"Kakashi-sensei!"

Kakashi froze, and he his heart stopped; how could he had been so stupid, and forgotten about her...?

"No Sakura, get out of here!" he exclaimed, calling off his clones at once, and running from his position towards his pink-haired student... but it was too late; Naruto had already spotted her, and as he lunged, Sakura merely stood frozen, transfixed with fear.

A/N:... It's a bit shorter then the last chapter, but I really wanted to post something this weekend... so here it is! Oh, I'm so mean, leaving it with a cliffhanger like this...

Be sure to drop a review. :) They really mean a lot to me. Oh, and I'd like to give a big "Thank You" to everyone who *has* reviewed so far.
;)